



SPC Harry Graham and WO1 Chad Cavender, 2nd Battalion, 319th Field Artillery (2-319 FA) (Airborne), 82nd Airborne Division, call for fire on a suspected weapons cache during a terrain denial mission, Iraq, 11 June 2007. (Photo by SGT Jeffrey Alexander)

FA Officer Manning SITREP

By CW4 Dorian K. Brunson; Mary Patrick; Majors Joshua R. Richardson, Julian T. Urquidez, John J. Montgomery, Kevin R. Taylor and Robert Wright; and Lieutenant Colonels Andrew C. Gainey and Michael J. Gould, all FA

In light of the annual Fire Support Seminar, Field Artillery (FA) Branch at Human Resources Command (HRC), Alexandria, Virginia, is providing this “situation report” (SITREP) from our “foxhole” on the state of our officer corps and a sense for the trends and perceptions from the field. In many ways, this has been a good year for FA. Exceptional accessions from US Military Academy (USMA), Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and Officer Candidate School (OCS) and a leveling off of attrition at all ranks increased our manning strength. Battalion command opportunities are strong, and selection rates remain extraordinarily high through colonel. Additionally, HRC has been successful in providing more opportunities for officers to serve

in broadening assignments and more choices in assignments overall.

Despite these positive trends, challenges remain. Our inventory of officers, particularly at the captain and major grades, continues to be significantly less than our authorizations and requirements. This continues to strain our generating force; Training and Doctrine Command, combat training centers (CTCs), active Army, Reserve Component and other organizations across the Army that train and prepare our officers to serve.

These challenges are not unique to FA, nor are they fleeting; they will be with us for the foreseeable future. Upcoming changes and reorganizations in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom will put additional strain on the force in the short term, but should provide

some relief in the long run to help bring us back into balance.

During the past year, HRC informally kept track of trends and perceptions from the field to share with senior leaders and to help us improve our tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) as assignment officers. FA Branch managers’ mission is to meet Army requirements and serve Redleg officers. We take that mission seriously and continuously adapt to demands of the Army’s and officers’ needs.

This article is an update from each HRC officer assignment desk to inform the Fire Support Seminar attendees and add to the dialogue.

Warrant Officer (WO) Assignments. FA WOs are the fastest growing and most diverse group of officers in the Field Artillery. They are the most frequently

deployed FA officers, and they continually perform at an extremely high level of proficiency. There are roughly 400 WOs in FA, and the demands for their abilities are being solicited across all echelons of the Army and unconventional forces. Lately, HRC has received questions about the assignment process, unit strength, career progression and operational tempo (OPTEMPO).

HRC looks at each officer's assignment request individually. It considers the needs of the Army, availability, career development and officer preference. No two requests are the same. The FA warrant assignment desk currently is faced with a difficult challenge.

The FA WO corps is under-strength. It is at 75 percent of its authorized strength, including deployed units. HRC has been directed to maintain this unit-fill percentage across the force. Therefore, when an officer is reassigned, we must ensure that the prospective unit does not drop below 75 percent.

Occasionally, units are above that percentage because of stop-loss/stop-move, life-cycle management, dwell time, the exceptional family member program (EFMP) and time-on-station. At times this becomes a one-for-one swap, trying to match ranks, experiences, professional development and time available to move. HRC continues to work with the officer to meet the Army requirement and the officer's needs.

Lately, our officers have been faced with inhibited career progression due to modularity, having no senior FA leader oversight at division level and because brigades are deploying independently. Our officers are caught between changes-of-command and units with quick redeployment timelines. To mitigate this, HRC continuously engages with brigade combat team (BCT) commanders to allow these officers to move up to divisions and corps to get the professional development they need. With constant communication, it is beginning to succeed.

OPTEMPO is on the minds of our officers. To minimize the stress of back-to-back deployments, HRC uses temporary duty assignments to allow officers to regain some stabilization and rebuild some solidity within their families.

Overall, the perception from the field is good. HRC keeps the lines of communication open and receives effective feedback, while distributing relevant information in a timely matter. HRC strives to place the right officer into the right position at the right time.

Lieutenants. The newly accessed lieutenants are smart, energetic and very intelligent. Each one brings his unique ideas and experiences to the Branch and the Army to make a difference in the War on Terrorism (WOT). HRC provides information to the lieutenant population concerning anything from, "when will assignment and orders be released" to "what classes will I attend?" to "where will I live while attending BOLC?" Feedback from the field continues to be positive from the officers and their leaders.

Lieutenants attend Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC). BOLC consists of three phases. Phase I, conducted by the commissioning sources (USMA, ROTC and OCS), provides supporting skills—knowledge that gives the lieutenants a foundation. Phase II, is taught at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and Fort Benning, Georgia. All lieutenants attend this six-to-seven week course that teaches leadership development—much of this course is conducted in the field environment. Phase III is a 15-week training course that teaches the tactical and technical training at the branch schools (Infantry at Fort Benning, FA at Fort Sill). Some lieutenants attend a two-week Assignment Orientation Training (AOT) Course focused on the type of their assigned unit.

Additionally, lieutenants have the opportunity to attend Airborne and Ranger schools en-route to their assignments. A Pre-Ranger Program at Fort Sill has helped improve the number of lieutenants who compete and graduate from the intensive eight-week Ranger course. OCS graduates also have the opportunity to attend a university to complete their bachelor's degrees under the Army Degree Completion Program (DCP) for a period of 12 months to 18 months.

Lieutenants are accessed into the Army as regular Army officers for three to four years for ROTC and OCS graduates and five years for USMA graduates. Second lieutenants are promoted to first lieutenants at 18 months

time-in-grade. Junior and senior lieutenants are eligible for the captain Army Competitive-Category Promotion Board based upon their first lieutenant dates of rank.

Junior Captains. This past winter, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army directed HRC to get more officers to Professional Military Education (PME) and sooner, especially to the Captain's Career Course (CCC). During the past seven years, many officers' career progression has been disrupted due to the OPTEMPO associated with WOT. This policy change will reduce the back-log of officers who need to attend CCC and will balance the population of company-grade officers within units better. Additionally, it provides predictability to junior officers and their leaders.

HRC mandated FA Branch to slate junior captains and promotable first lieutenants for CCC attendance within 180 days of their redeployment dates. This affords officers a 90-day stabilization period before a permanent change of station (PCS). Additionally, it allows officers to PCS during a unit's Reset period so that back-fills can arrive (in this case, CCC graduates) before the unit's next deployment.

Feedback from junior officers and their leader in the field reveals several concerns. FA battalion commanders are concerned that their young officers



1LT Donald J. Frisco, 5-82 FA, 4th Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 1st Cavalry Division, paddles down Victory Canal in search of criminal smugglers during Operation Chattahoochee, Iraq, 18 March. (Photo by 1st Lt. Bryan Hammond, 4th BCT, 1st Cavalry Division Public Affairs)



CPT Matthew Tarazon, 1-319 FA (Airborne), 3rd BCT, 82nd Airborne Division, speaks with Lt. Col. Muhammed of the Iraqi national police, preparing to conduct a joint inspection of Iraqi Security Forces checkpoints in Karada, eastern Baghdad, Iraq, 18 March. (Photo by Staff Sgt. James Selesnick, Joint Combat Camera Center Iraq)

are not being afforded the opportunity to serve in multiple developmental assignments as lieutenants. This is a valid concern that units must mitigate by disciplined officer management at the battalion and brigade levels.

Holding officers in order to “keep them on the team” causes several problems. First, statistics show that junior officers who deploy more than once with the same unit before attending CCC have a higher attrition rate. Secondly, these officers are promoted to captain, yet remain in traditional lieutenant billets (platoon leaders, company fire support officers [FSOs], etc.). Finally, a delay in CCC attendance limits the number of post-career course, key developmental jobs they can serve in, which directly affects their chances of being promoted below-the-zone to major.

The other concern stemming from early placement in FACCC comes from junior captains, themselves. Many feel that they will be unprepared to command at the battery level or perform as battalion FSOs due to a lack of experience on the gun line or as company FSOs.

The Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill has developed several initiatives to mitigate these concerns. The FACCC has been expanded to six months and now includes a Reset phase that focuses on the weapon system that officers will serve on after graduation. Additionally, there are numerous schooling opportunities now available to FACCC graduates: Ranger, Airborne, Pathfinder, Joint Firepower Control, Joint Fires Observer, Electronic Warfare, Fire Support Coordinator, Sur-

vival/Evasion/Resistance/Escape and Joint Fires and Effects courses.

These courses, when combined with the five-week gunnery program of instruction (POI), the two-week Reset POI and the four-month small group POI, effectively serve to “re-Red” FA officers on their core-competency tasks. Initial feedback from students and instructors at Fort Sill validated the effectiveness of this training. Competent officers are arriving at their follow-on duty stations confident that they will be able to serve successfully in any billet assigned.

Senior Captains. In the many emails HRC receives, the field’s perception is that post-command FA captains want an assignment that provides an opportunity to get off of the line and reconnect with family and other personal goals—essentially their first chance in a career that is approaching the 10-year mark. Although it is clear that the pace of current operations is taxing, these professionals are overwhelmingly positive and show a mature understanding of the “big picture” and the challenges that the Army faces.

Some of the negative feedback stems from officers not getting assignments of their choice. Competitive fellowships/scholarships and other nominative programs represent a multitude of ways for an officer to take ownership of their post-command assignment (beyond what HRC could normally offer). Opportunities such as Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Internship, Congressional Fellow, Olmstead Scholar, Downing Scholar and USMA instructor/tactical officer assign-

ments offer superb broadening experiences and are ways to expand upon the options that HRC has available.

The good news story continues to be the quality of senior FA captains across the Army. As evidence, FA had two captains selected as JCS Interns for fiscal year 2009 (FY09), one selected as a Congressional Fellow for FY10, two competing at the final level for the Olmstead scholarship and many selected as professors and tactical officers at USMA. In addition, FA has begun to fill battalion FSO positions at all 16 Special Forces battalions at the behest of US Army Special Operations Command commanders. In general, as HRC reassigns senior captains across the force, BCT (and higher) commanders routinely fight to retain Artillerymen for second commands—often commands traditionally reserved for maneuver branches. The quality of the 13-series senior captain is a well-known, rare commodity.

Majors. The current FA major population roughly consists of 750 Redlegs from across the force. Daily interaction with these officers provided HRC with candid feedback regarding past, current and future assignments. HRC also confirms or denies rumors about the assignment process and current trends and opportunities reference Intermediate Level Education (ILE) attendance and key developmental time.

Many officers are concerned about their career timelines and when they will attend ILE. Field Artillery Branch’s goal is to have 100 percent of every year-group either ILE-complete or at least enrolled in the course before their primary zones of consideration for lieutenant colonel. ILE attendance is not determined by cohort year group, and there is no back-log for officers to attend ILE. The current OPTEMPO drives attendance to ILE.

For an officer to be “available,” the officer must not be stop-move/stop-loss restricted, deployed or have less than 12 months time on station. If the officer is available, then he can be considered for attendance based on current manning guidance and the needs of the Army.

A typical class for FA consists of the entire spectrum of eligible year-groups. Officers have the option of attending ILE at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, a foreign or sister service ILE or the blended learning course at multiple satellite campuses. Fort Leavenworth conducts two separate courses for ILE, one with a start date of August and graduation in June and the second course starting in February and graduating in December.

A Military Personnel (MILPER) message is released each year that addresses current policies and rules for competing for the foreign and sister service school opportunities. The blended learning course can be completed as a temporary duty (TDY) and return or a TDY en-route. The course allows the officer to complete the common core curriculum while TDY, and then the officer must complete the final phase (Army Operating Warfighting Course) via correspondence.

FA Branch will continue to slate officers based on current officer availability. Officers should contact their assignment officer approximately 10-12 months before their desired attendance dates to ensure proper coordination.

Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA-PAM) 600-3 is the Army publication that governs key and developmental time for FA officers. Questions always exist about "hard" versus "soft" key developmental time; those terms are not used or identified in DA-PAM 600-3. Per the current DA-PAM for FA majors, key developmental assignments consist of brigade/battalion executive officer and S3 positions, and deputy or assistant fire

support coordinator at the brigade level or higher headquarters.

Most FA officers will have a mix of developmental assignments that will be different from their peers. Some officers may have multiple key developmental assignments and some, possibly, may have none. In either case, a hard working and dedicated officer will find career success and make a significant contribution to the success of FA. FA Branch will continue to assign officers to positions that afford them the opportunity to be assigned by the chain of command into key and developmental positions.

Lieutenant Colonels. Managing a little more than 420 FA lieutenant colonels, HRC routinely discusses assignments, promotion boards, school boards and numerous other topics. Lately, HRC has received both positive and negative feedback from FA lieutenant colonels, focusing on stability from the OPTEMPO and the assignment process.

Stability from the OPTEMPO. Numerous officers have been or are about to go on world-wide assignments that usually result in a deployment. After having deployed multiple times, many FA lieutenant colonels are ready to stabilize the family. The perception from the field is that lieutenant colonels cannot be stabilized in one location greater than 24 months. This is untrue.

Officers who have high school senior aged children, low dwell time and numerous other variables can submit a Department of the Army 4187 requesting to extend for 12 additional months. FA Branch decides on a case-by-case basis whether or not to approve the extension request. Most of the recent disapprovals were a result of surging requirements within FA Branch or the individual's lack of a world-wide assignment/deployment.

PCS Options and Locations. Most calls are from officers who are ready to move to their next assignment, but are frustrated with limited options/locations (division fire support positions, WOT requirements, Korea, etc.). Most of these officers have a "wish-list," and it does not sync with the assignments on the FA Branch Web site.

Unfortunately, FA Branch does not create the requirements on the Web site. We

have an internal process for distributing assignments that is based on the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) guidance, driven by the HRC Distribution Division personnel. They prioritize all of the Army's needs and distribute them to each branch within HRC.

The officers who are less frustrated contacted FA Branch nine to 12 months out to work their follow-on assignment. This is important as it gives both the FA officer and assignment officer an opportunity to explore and plan all options realistically. Some of these officers planned early enough to compete for and get accepted to selection boards, such as professor of military science, fellowships and other nominative assignments.

The good news story continues to be the endurance of the senior lieutenant colonels within FA Branch. In times of multiple deployments and numerous PCS moves, our FA lieutenant colonels are finding ways to overcome adversity. Although we have seen high numbers of FA lieutenant colonels retiring at 20 years, we also are seeing a number withdraw their retirement packets to continue to serve in critical FA billets.

The Way Ahead. Communication, early and often, has been and remains the single best TTP for managing Army requirements, officer educational and developmental needs, and officers' preferences for assignments. FA faces significant challenges in the short term, but we at FA Branch are encouraged by the overall morale, quality and professionalism of the Field Artillery officer corps.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael J. Gould, Field Artillery (FA), is the Field Artillery Branch Chief and leads the Officer Personnel Management Directorate-Field Artillery Branch team at Human Resources Command, Alexandria, Virginia. The team consists of Chief Warrant Officer Four Dorian K. Brunson, FA Branch Warrant Officer Assignment Manager; Mary Patrick, FA Branch Lieutenant Assignment Manager; Major Josh R. Richardson, FA Branch Senior Captain Assignment Manager; Major Julian T. Urquidez, FA Branch Future Readiness Officer; Major Kevin R. Taylor, FA Branch Junior Captain Post-Career Course Assignment Manager; Major John J. Montgomery FA Branch Junior Captain Pre-Career Course Assignment Manager; Major Robert Wright, FA Branch Major Assignment Manager; and Lieutenant Colonel Andrew C. Gainey, FA Branch Lieutenant Colonel Assignment Manager.



LTC Matthew Anderson, Commander, 2-8 FA, 1st Stryker BCT, 25th Infantry Division, greets a local Iraqi man running a food stand, Jaleel, Iraq, 30 December 2008. (Photo by SPC Opal Vaughn, 14th Public Affairs Detachment)